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TAGS: SENV KSCA IT EU
SUBJECT: PARTICULATE MATTER AIR POLLUTION IN ITALY: AN INTRACTABLE PROBLEM WITH NO EASY SOLUTION

¶1. SUMMARY: Air pollution is a serious and intractable problem in Italy, causes health problems, and shortens Italian life spans. Emissions levels and particulate matter (PM) concentrations are highest in Italy's northern industrial Po Valley between Bologna, Milan and Turin. While industry and vehicular traffic are the primary contributors to PM pollution in the north, Italy's Mediterranean climate and airborne materials like dust, volcanic dust, and marine spray also contribute to high PM levels in the less industrial south. When EU anti-air pollution guidelines and pollution limits came into effect last January, Italy's PM emissions were above the EU limits despite GOI programs to provide better air quality monitoring, expand public transportation, and offer incentives to reduce vehicular traffic. From January through March, Rome and seven major cities imposed Sunday and/or alternate weekday driving bans as temporary measures to reduce PM emissions from the major source of PM air pollution, passenger vehicles, the source of 70 percent of PM in Italy. After the shock of this winter's draconian traffic bans, the GOI is tackling the problem systematically. A ministerial decree established the National Commission on the Atmospheric Pollution Emergency (CNEIA). CNEIA, whose twelve working groups will announce findings in September, has set the goal of reducing PM concentrations and other related emissions by 30 percent to meet EU guidelines. In addition, the Ministry of Environment (MOE) has created a group of experts, representing the PM emitting and health sectors, to address the critical industrial and transportation aspect of PM pollution. END SUMMARY.

ITALY CONSISTENTLY OVER EU EMISSIONS LIMITS

¶2. EU Directive 1999/30/CE and its Italian counterpart, ministerial decree 351, set the deadline for compliance with annual EU-wide and Italian PM emission limits as of January 1, ¶2005. The limits require annual averages to be below 40 micrograms of PM emissions per cubic meter. Daily averages of PM emissions must be below 50 micrograms per cubic meter, and this limit must not be exceeded more than 35 days per year. Since EU Directive 2001/839/EC, all EU member states must report PM and other pollutant emission levels annually to the EC; this directive also obliges members breaching limits to attain specified target ranges by 2005 and 2010. However, there are no penalties for non-compliance with either the EU or national targets.

EARLY 2005 CITY CENTERS SHUT DOWN TO REDUCE POLLUTION

¶3. After EU anti-air pollution guidelines and pollution limits went into effect on January 1, 2005, Rome and seven other major cities imposed traffic bans in city centers to reduce PM pollution from the main cause, vehicles. Every other Thursday for twelve weeks, Rome alternately banned cars with even and odd license plates from driving in the central area. Most motorcycles, mopeds ("motorinos"), and Euro 4 environment-friendly cars escaped the ban; but older diesel cars and other excessive polluters like Euro 0 motorcycles were completely banned. In February, still struggling to comply with EU regulations, seven other Italian cities enforced similar traffic bans every Sunday and fined drivers who did not respect the imposed traffic bans.

ITALY'S CONTRIBUTION TO EU POLLUTION

¶4. In 2000, Italy contributed eleven percent of total EU PM10 emissions. (I can't find other countries' percentages. I found this fact in an Italy specific article and I can't seem to find any articles on the EU webpages, or in general, that compare the EU member states PM emission percentages.) PM10 is particulate matter pollution composed of larger particles, usually made of natural or other primary substances. Primary substances are natural particles such as salt or sand, while secondary substances are compounds with natural substances and/or pollutant gases formed in airborne chemical reactions or cohesions. Italy contributed twelve percent of total EU PM2.5, composed of smaller, usually secondary, particles and causes

more health risks than PM10. (Secondary particles are compounds with natural substances and/or pollutant gases formed in airborne chemical reactions or cohesions.) Only 78 percent of total PM emissions in Italy, however, are actually emitted nationally. Wind can carry PM2.5 especially far, and thus, all

of Italy is affected by PM2.5 emitted in other countries.

ITALY'S PM PROBLEM BLAME IT ON THE MOBILE SOCIETY

¶5. Overall, APAT, Italy's Environmental Protection Agency, reports that transport causes 70 percent of all PM in Italy. According to the "Italian Environment 2005" study, Italy's car-to-person ratio in Italy is the highest in Europe 59.3 cars for every 100 inhabitants. Additionally, nearly 45 percent of Italy's commercial vehicles are older than ten years, the highest in Europ; and they consequently pollute more. Despite the fact that individual cars contribute less to PM, Italy's great increase in automobiles, according to APAT, is responsible
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for Italy's lack of progress in reducing PM emissions to EU-acceptable levels. Also unique to Italy are its polluting mopeds and motorbikes, "motorinos," that zip in and out of traffic. While higher-polluting motorbikes have been subject to traffic bans in many historic city centers during certain hours, the EU has not passed stricter regulations on them because Italy is the only member state with such a significant number of these vehicles in use. Unfortunately for Italy, prospects for fewer "motorinos" in the traffic mix are not in the cards. According to the MOE, a more efficient (more buses versus expensive electric buses), sufficient, and non-polluting public transport system is years away in the cash-strapped regions. Expenses of lower-polluting underground and light-rail public transport systems are further compounded, given Italy's population and antiquity densities in historic urban centers.

SERIOUS EFFECTS ON ITALIAN MORTALITY

¶6. While current life expectancies are 78 years for men and 84 years for women in Italy and 75.1 years for men and 81.6 years for women in the EU overall, recent studies have shown that air pollution is having more serious effects on life expectancy for Italians than for other EU citizens. According to recent World Health Organization (WHO) reports, every Italian loses nine months of life, compared to only 8.6 on average for the rest of the EU on account of exposure to PM. 106 Italians die every day from the effects of PM. If Italy reduced PM air pollution to the annual EU average limit of 40 micrograms per cubic meter, every Italian would gain 3.4 months of life, meaning that from now until 2020, Italy would avoid 12,000 deaths.

¶7. As for negative health effects, both PM10 and the smaller PM2.5 can trigger irritating coughs, heart arrhythmias, blood clots, strokes, cancerous tumors, and increased hospital stays for those with existing cardiac or pulmonary problems. In 2000, Italy spent 59 to 126 million euro paying for health care related to the effects of PM. If it fully implements EU legislation, Italy could lower that amount to 38 to 82 million euro by 2020.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

¶8. Because wind can carry PM long distances, air pollution often contributes to acidification of lakes and damages sensitive forest and farm crops, thus reducing agricultural revenue. Italy also suffers unquantified losses in tourism revenues PM smog that causes monument erosion ("stone cancer") and haze. Italy's slow economic growth in recent years makes funds hard to come by to help mitigate these negative effects. According to a June article in La Repubblica (a leading left-of-center daily newspaper), the Interministerial Economic Planning Committee (CIPE) only dedicates six percent of investments to economic damage from PM pollution.

GOI EFFORTS TO REDUCE PM: CUTTING TOXICITY

¶9. To balance the picture, over the last fifteen years, Italy successfully reduced pollutants that increase PM toxicity by switching to unleaded fuel and using alternative energy sources, like wind farms and substituting natural gas for oil. The country has seen an 83 percent cut in sulfur emissions, a 70 percent cut in carbon monoxide, and similar decreases in nitrogen emissions. While decreased sulphur and carbon emissions could have contributed to falling PM emissions levels, PM pollution emissions have not decreased for the last several

years because of the transport issues described earlier.

GOI EFFORTS TO REDUCE PM: MONITORING STATIONS

¶10. In 1994, the Italian Ministry of Atmospheric Pollution and Mobility (IAM) updated its PM monitoring stations to conform to EU standards, which required stations to be in more direct contact with emissions. The MOE, however, noted that Italian stations never passed through the same quality-guaranteeing phases like stations in other EU member states. Now, at more local levels, the MOE has extensive projects in place to position monitor stations in the most "representative" locations.

POLLUTION-REDUCTION INITIATIVES

¶11. Following the legislation passed in 1999 and 2000 that set PM emission limits for 2005 and 2010, the MOE expanded public transportation, created local and regional "mobility manager" positions for the transport sector, and promoted methanol-based gasoline. Since 1999, the MOE has spent at least 306.3 million euro for vehicles, providing incentives and funds to individuals and localities to buy electrical or hybrid cars. The government initiative "Finance 2005" exempts biodiesel taxation 2005-2010. In July, the MOE announced an allocation of ten million euro for car-sharing initiatives. In the last twelve months, the number of people participating in car-sharing has nearly doubled from 2,200 to 4,300.

NEW COMMISSION FORMED

¶12. The National Commission for the Atmospheric Pollution Emergency (CNEIA), created in March, is the GOI's latest initiative to tackle the problem. CNEIA has determined that PM concentrations and those of all other related emissions must be reduced by 30 percent nationally to reduce annual average concentrations for Italy to meet the EU limits. CNEIA has twelve working groups that will announce findings and plans for reducing Italy's PM emissions in September. The CNEIA will collect and interpret PM pollutant information from Italy's regions as well as from the EU. The new body will also formulate workable, technological and organizational ways to reduce PM emissions. Bruno Agricola, MOE Director General for Environmental Safety, has created an additional permanent group of experts from the critical emitting sectors and health sectors to work with the Commission to create more air-friendly industrial and transport processes.

COMMENT

¶13. The GOI faces a serious challenge to reduce PM emissions, given the transport sector's heavy (70 percent) contribution to air pollution as a result of Italy's high car-to-inhabitant ratio, the high average age of Italy's commercial vehicles, and the popularity of "motorinos" in congested city centers. The Ministry of Environment experts we consulted thought that programs would only be effective if the GOI could make the population aware of the hazardous health effects of PM and the significant contribution of vehicular transport to air pollution. A recent study by the Institute of Public Opinion Studies (ISPO), however, revealed that the majority of Italians do realize that they are contributing to health-damaging air pollution, but they are not willing to drive less because they consider public transportation inefficient and parking around public transportation to be lacking. In addition, the GOI may have a harder time convincing people to use public transportation alternatives in light of recent transportation-related terrorist attacks in Europe. With the establishment of the National Commission for the Atmospheric Pollution Emergency, the GOI has taken a step in the right direction by reformulating existing public awareness, transport, and energy programs that target PM pollution into a comprehensive and effective strategy designed to bring Italy into compliance with EU PM limits. END COMMENT.

¶14. This message was drafted by ECON-SCI intern Michelle Lanspa.
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